

Benefits Questions and Answers

Q1 What are my State unemployment benefits when separated in a RIF?

Answer: You will need to contact your State unemployment office to receive accurate information with regard to your eligibility for State unemployment benefits.

Q2 Will USAG apply for "Restored Leave" authority?

Answer: "Restored Leave" authority is only granted after Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decisions; it is not issued for CA studies.

Q3 Can the USAG provide counseling sessions one-on-one with benefits experts, or even group sessions, etc.

Answer: This question will be forwarded to the CA Steering Committee as to the feasibility and when it would be a good timeframe, etc. Possibly the ABC Center from Fort Riley, KS may be available to brief on the "how-tos" and questions on retirement issues and the best considerations in respect to the Contracting Out situation. That would have to be a group session; however, it appears that the employees present at the 19 Dec 01 session are really looking for individual counseling and have some adversity to the ABC Center and its workings. As stated at the 19 Dec 01 briefing, the knowledge and resources are not currently available in the CPAC/CPOC to do this effort and the Army Benefits Center was established for this purpose and does have counselors who can be reached telephonically if employees do not have web or email access. We are in the process of contacting the ABC-Center relative to on-site "one-on-one" support that they may provide to the USAG.

Q4 Will funds be allocated to provide new skills for affected employees in DIS trades, for example commercial licensing and certifications?

Answer: Based on a Comptroller General Decision, we cannot pay fees for exams and licensing. We can however work with employees to identify training that will provide them with the skills and knowledges needed for the exams. There are existing programs available within DCTEE to help employees with training. The USAG Tuition Assistance is available to all garrison employees, this program pays 50% of tuition for garrison employees attending mission-related courses. The DCTEE encourages all CA affected employees to schedule an interview and register with the DCTEE to see what is available for their particular needs.

We will check with other installations to see how they are addressing training needs of employees affected by CA Studies.

Also we learned that the Job Partnership Training Act (JPTA) is a possible program that can be used to train employees subject to RIF. Some employees from Fort Ritchie were funded for training under this program while undergoing the RIF as a result of the BRAC decision. We will look into application of this program at Fort Detrick.

Q5 If a government employee is given a RIF notice and does not go on the Priority Placement List, but accepts a job with the winning contractor, does he still receive severance pay from the Government?

Answer: There are various conditions which have to be met to be eligible for Severance Pay. Generally speaking, an employee must have served the preceding twelve months in a permanent position (or a

combination of permanent and temporary service with no break in service of more than three calendar days) and be facing involuntary separation through reduction-in-force. Or, the employee could have received a RIF offer and declined it because the new job was more than two grades lower than the current job; declined it because it had a different tenure (e.g., temporary appointment); declined it because of a different work schedule (e.g., full-time going to part-time). If you meet the eligibility requirements and accept a contractor's job offer you can collect Severance Pay. The Civilian Personnel Office will automatically enroll employees in the PPP upon their notification of RIF, as it is mandatory for those employees facing separation.

Q6 Can I keep my medical and life insurance until I am covered by another plan? Will the payments be the same?

Answer: If separated, your health and life insurance will continue for 31 days, free of cost, after you are separated. You will be given the option to continue health insurance for 18 months at the employee's contribution of the cost if you are RIF'd, and the full cost, which includes the government's and employee's contribution, if you resign. You will be mailed a form in your "separation packet" to send to the Office of Federal Employees Group Life Insurance to get options about continuing life insurance upon separation.

Q7 Can I "cash in" my sick leave and annual leave if I lose my job?

Answer: When you leave federal service, you receive a lump sum payment for any unused annual leave. If you retire under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), your sick leave will be credited to your retirement as additional time in service. If you resign, are terminated, or retire under the Federal employees Retirement system (FERS), you will lose your sick leave, but if you are re-employed with the federal government your sick leave will be restored.

Q8 Can I use my sick leave all at one and then go out?

Answer: Sick leave may only be used in accordance with applicable leave administration rules and regulations (AR 690-9902).

Q9 Am I entitled to unemployment benefits if I am RIF'd?

Answer: Entitlement to unemployment benefits is determined by the State Unemployment Commission under the applicable provisions of the State Unemployment Compensation Law in the state which you reside. In order to determine your eligibility for unemployment compensation, you must go to your State Unemployment Commission and file a claim after you are separated by Reduction In Force (RIF).

Q10 Is the contractor obligated in the bid to offer a similar benefit package as we now have?

Answer: No. The contractor must meet the requirements of the Service Contract Act but has the right to determine which benefits he will offer above those required. All benefits offered by the contractor will have to be negotiated with each individual hired.

Q11 Can I leave my money in the TSP until retirement age if I lose my job? Will it continue to earn interest if left in? Can I receive a lump sum payment?

Answer: All employees who leave federal service have the same TSP withdrawal options. Employees whose account balances are under \$3,500 will receive an automatic cash-out of the account. Account balances over \$3,500 can be left in the TSP until age 70 ½ and will continue to earn interest. Any of the following withdrawal options may be elected after separation from federal service:

- Lump sum payment
- Payment in monthly installments
- Roll over to another retirement account or IRA
- Leave money in the TSP and make withdrawal election at a later date

Q12 How do I roll over my TSP to another fund? When do I have to roll it over?

Answer: The form to roll over your TSP will be in the "separation packet" which will be given to you when you out-process or mailed to you by the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) upon your separation. You can roll it over at any time provided you have more than \$3,500 in the account and do not have an automatic cash-out.

Q13 If I have a loan against my TSP and there is a contract win, what happens to the outstanding loan amount?

Answer: Your loan agreement requires that you repay the loan in full when you leave federal service. The TSP will send you a notice with instructions for repayment when you separate. If TSP does not receive your repayment in full within 90 days of the notice to repay, a taxable distribution of the unpaid loan principal will be declared.

Additional information about the Thrift Savings Plan can be found at the TSP Web Site:
<http://www.tsp.gov>

Q14 How is severance pay calculated? How long does it last?

Answer: The process for calculating severance pay is outlined under applicable Reduction In Force and pay setting regulations, 5 CFR (550-701).

Q15 Will the contract offer salaries similar to those paid to me now?

Answer: The only requirement is that the contractor pay salaries (to include fringe benefits) that satisfy the legal minimums for work on a federal contract (the "wage rates"). Beyond those minimums, contractors are free to negotiate with their workers. In this job market, it can be speculated that a contractor will have to pay above the rates to recruit and retain a quality workforce.

Q16 understand that the contractor is subject to a requirement that he pay wages (and benefits) at least as great as the appropriate Department of Labor wage determinations. Is this correct? Would it be possible for the work force to see these determinations, to see the minimum the competition will have to pay, to have them updated as new determinations are issued?

Answer: The contractor is subject to a requirement that he pay wages equal (at least) to the wage determinations issued by the Department of Labor. These wage determinations may be downloaded at any time from the Department of Labor web site. When new wage determinations are issued, the

solicitation or contract must be modified to reflect the new rates. The members of the workforce can obtain the wage determination information at any time. However, the information contained within the Management Study (primarily the details of the MEO) will not be made available to the workforce prior to the comparison of the in-house bid and the contractors' bids. Any disclosure of that information would jeopardize the integrity of the CA process of comparing the government MEO against the contractors bid.

Q17 Will the contract offer salaries similar to those paid to me now?

Answer: Employee compensation will be determined by discussions between the contractor and the employees.

Q18 What happens to official compensatory time that has been accrued and is on the books when a person takes VERA/VSIP or if they are separated as a result of a RIF?

Answer: It will be paid to the individual when they leave federal service.

Q19 If I lose my job, what options will I have with my Thrift Savings Plan?

Answer: You would have all of the normal options of any former government employee. You can leave the money on deposit until you reach retirement age; it can be withdrawn (tax penalty); rolled over into another TSP or IRA (no tax penalty).